Backgrounder #27

Recent Operations against Special Groups and JAM in Central and Southern Iraq

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Introduction

On Tuesday March 25, 2008, Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) launched a security offensive to restore stability and law in Basra province by wresting control of the city from illegal Shi'a militias and criminal groups. Basra had become a haven for militia and criminal activity, especially in the wake of the British withdrawal from the city center in December 2007. Rival Shi'a militias, including Muqtada al-Sadr's Jaysh al-Mahdi (JAM) militia, have since been engaged in a violent and protracted power struggle;[1] and drugs, weapons, and oil smuggling rings have also thrived.

While the Iraqi Security Forces had been planning a multi-phased operation in Basra, for reasons not yet known, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki launched the offensive much earlier than many Coalition and Iraqi commanders had expected and before many of the ISF reinforcements had even arrived.[2] In the days that followed, as Iraqi Army and Police units sought to oust Jaysh al-Mahdi militias from many of their strongholds in Basra, gunfights and violent clashes broke out across the city. At that time, it became clear that the Mahdi Army—with the help of Iranian-trained, funded, and armed cells known as Special Groups—was deeply entrenched in many neighborhoods of Basra.[3] The Iraqi Security Forces faced much tougher resistance than Maliki had expected. As clashes between JAM gunmen and government forces continued, Iraqi reinforcements, Coalition air assets, and even U.S. Special Forces joined the Basra offensive.[4] The fighting in Basra also prompted clashes between government security forces and Shi'a extremists across southern Iraq and in Baghdad.

Finally, after five days of intense fighting, Muqtada al-Sadr ordered his militia to stand down. His March 30 ceasefire came after negotiations in Iran with representatives from the other main Shi'a political parties, Dawa and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI). Interestingly, the deal was brokered by the head of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard-Quds Force, the organization responsible for backing Special Groups in Iraq.[5] Days after the ceasefire, it was reported that much of the violence in Basra had subsided, and that the "Iraqi forces now controlled central Basra and its northern border, and

that they had begun moving into militia strongholds north of the city."[6] Despite the formal end of hostilities, Coalition airstrikes and Iraqi Ground Forces have continued to target Special Groups members in Basra and in the surrounding areas.[7]

As the dust settles Basra, the outcome of the offensive and the state of the enemy remain unclear. At the same time, the clashes that erupted in Baghdad and elsewhere across southern Iraq in response to the Basra offensive are quite revealing. Indeed, recent events in Baghdad, the Five Cities area, and Dhi Qar province are important to grasp not only because they explain the nature of the enemy system in southern Iraq but also because they demonstrate the capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces.
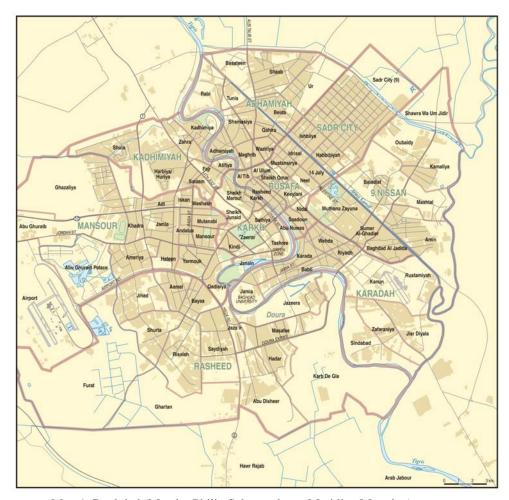
Baghdad

Since the defeat of al-Qaeda in Iraq in Baghdad and the stand-down of mainstream JAM militias under Muqtada al-Sadr's ceasefire, Special Groups have emerged as the primary enemy threat to stability in Baghdad. In recent months, their activity has been on the rise in Baghdad. According to Major General Kevin Bergner, the spike in violence in Baghdad during the Basra offensive was a result of violence by Iranian-backed Special Groups, who sought to use the reaction by JAM militias across Iraq and in the capital to further "undermine the legitimate authority of the government by creating fear, division, and distrust."[8]

As is the case throughout central and southern Iraq, these Shi'a militia groups receive funding, training, and weapons from the Iranian Quds Force, for the sole purpose of targeting Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces. Advanced weapons used by Special Groups include especially-lethal explosively formed penetrators (EFP), which are capable of penetrating even heavily-armored vehicles, as well as light and heavy mortars, 107-mm rockets, and 240-mm rockets, which are used to attack Coalition and Iraqi bases in the capital.[9] While Special Groups are not responsive to the directives of Muqtada al-Sadr or mainstream JAM leaders, there is some overlap in the constituencies of these groups. Special Groups have been found to operate in many Sadrist strongholds, primarily in the districts of Sadr City, 9 Nissan, Kadhimiyah and West Rasheed. On account of the limited presence of Coalition and Iraqi Forces, Sadr City has been the hub of Special Groups activity in Baghdad.

Special Groups in Baghdad have relied on the Baghdad belts for the facilitation of funding, fighters, and weapons. There are two primary facilitation routes for moving them to and from Baghdad. The first route runs from the Special Groups hub in the neighborhoods of Sadr City, Shaab, and Ur, northeast of the capital into Diyala province. The second line of communication runs from the southern Baghdad Special Groups hubs in the Aamel, Bayaa, and Abu Disheer south of the capital into Babil and Wasit provinces. The rural areas in the provinces northeast and south of Baghdad function as a weapons depot for Special Groups operating in the capital; it is hardly surprising, therefore, that a number of large Iranian weapons caches that have been found in these outlying areas.[10]

Prior to the Basra offensive and the subsequent rise of violence in Baghdad, Coalition and Iraqi Forces had been engaged in an aggressive campaign against Special Groups networks. In the last three months alone, scores of Special Groups leaders and operatives have been detained in near daily operations and dozens of Iranian weapons caches have also been seized.[11] In most cases, Iraqi Soldiers and police

have either led or participated in these operations. Moreover, members of Sons of Iraq security volunteer groups have also assisted in thwarting Special Groups violence and many Baghdad residents have called in tips on the locations of criminals and caches.[12] The success of Iraqi Security Force, Coalition Force, and Sons of Iraq efforts was especially evident in the recent roll-up of the Hasnawi Special Groups network in Shaab and Ur.[13] These and other operations in northeast Baghdad have had some success in degrading the northern facilitation networks; as a result, activity along the Special Groups facilitation networks in the southern belts, primarily along Highway 8, has increased.[14] This network will be discussed in further detail below. Special Groups remain considerably active in the city. While the aggressive targeting of their networks in 9 Nissan, Adhamiyah, and Rasheed districts has limited the operational ability of these Shi'a extremists, as long as they maintain a stronghold in Sadr City they are still able to conduct their indirect fire campaign against Coalition and Iraqi Forces.

Map 1: Baghdad (Map by Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping)

The crackdown in Basra prompted a strong, and in some cases violent, backlash by Sadr's supporters in Baghdad. Civil disobedience movements and protests were conducted in a number of neighborhoods, including Sadr City, Aamel, Bayaa, and Shula. And over the course of the week, Coalition and Iraqi patrols were engaged by gunmen in the Sadrist strongholds of east Baghdad and Kadhimiyah; it is highly likely that mainstream JAM militiamen were involved, although level of enemy

coordination during a number of the attacks suggests Special Groups' leadership. However, the Special Groups caused the greatest threat to security and stability in the capital by launching indirect fire attacks. During the last week of March, Special Groups fired barrages of Iranian rockets and mortars at the Green Zone each day, aimed at the Government of Iraq and Coalition headquarters.[15] While a number of the enemy rockets and mortars hit their intended target, others fell on nearby residential neighborhoods, causing dozens of casualties.[16] Most of the rocket launch sites were traced to Sadr City,[17] and over the course of the week, Coalition Forces aggressively pursued those responsible.[18] While Iraqi Security Forces participated in the fighting, they did so with U.S. support.[19] In the heaviest of fighting, Coalition units took the lead. While the participation of the Iraqi Security Forces in the heavy fighting evidenced their improved capabilities and willingness, it also demonstrated that their success still relies on U.S. support and enablers.

The capital quieted significantly the first week of April following Muqtada al-Sadr's call for JAM members across Iraq to stand down. Yet, Iranian-backed Special Groups have continued to target Coalition and Iraqi forces in the capital with continued rocket, mortar, and EFP attacks.[20] In response, U.S. and Iraqi forces have begun to push deeper into Sadr City. Although U.S. forces had encircled Sadr City for more than a week, on April 5, they tightened their cordon around the area.[21] A day later, serious fighting broke out as Iraqi and U.S. troops maneuvering through an area of Sadr City were engaged by militia fighters.[22] Although the developments in Sadr City are still unfolding, the violence in Baghdad over the last two weeks has resulted in what appears to be a serious effort on the part of U.S. and Iraqi forces to deny Special Groups and their JAM supporters their most important stronghold in Baghdad, Sadr City. While efforts will certainly be massive and costly, targeting the Special Groups in Sadr City will stem their deadly attacks most effectively.
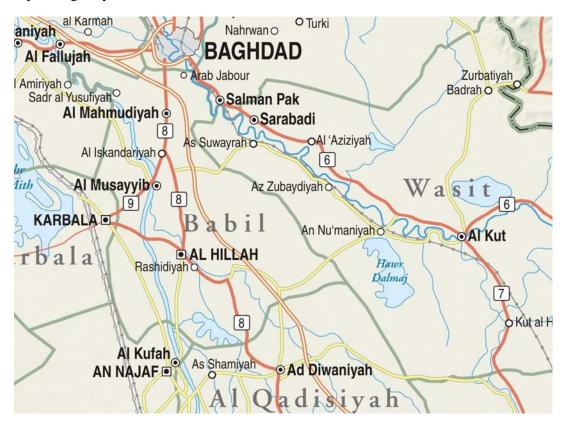
Five Cities

While JAM's largest strongholds are in Baghdad and Basra, the group has maintained a presence in the Five Cities area south of Baghdad: Karbala, Hillah, Kut, Najaf, and Diwaniyah.. These "regular JAM" elements have been associated with criminal activity inside neighborhoods of the cities. JAM's presence in the Five Cities areas was generally weakened over time, as the group suffered defeats in inter-Shi'a fighting that took place in Karbala and Diwaniyah over the past year.

Furthermore, the deployment of Coalition troops to several Shi'a strongholds the Southern Belts of Baghdad limited these Shi'a extremist groups' abilities to operate. Notably, Multi-National Division – Center placed a brigade of soldiers from the Republic of Georgia in the city of al-Kut, which had some success in interdicting the flow of weapons from Iran through al-Kut and then into Baghdad. There was a noticeable decline in Special Groups activities in al-Kut following the emplacement of the Georgian brigade in and around that city.

The expanded Coalition footprint apparently forced Iranian-sponsored Special Groups to rely on alternative lines of communication. The pattern of weapons cache discoveries as well as Special Group-style attacks strongly suggests that in addition to operating in Dhi Qar province, the Highway 8 corridor in North Babil has emerged as a major line of communication for Special Groups. Coalition and Iraqi

Forces discovered very large rocket and EFP caches in the areas of Hillah and Mahmudiya, both of which lie directly on Highway 8.

Map 2: Five Cities Area (Maps by Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping)

At the same time as the Special Groups' original line of communication was interdicted, JAM was brought under additional pressure by the ability of Soldiers in MND-C to project further southwards and to support Iraqi Security Force actions in the Five Cities. This seems to have been the case in the more northern cities of Karbala and Hillah. During Muqtada al-Sadr's cease fire, violence in these cities was limited. Yet as fighting erupted in response to the Basra offensive in late March, it seemed apparent that JAM militia elements remained present in substantial numbers within the neighborhoods of Karbala, Hillah, and al-Kut.

Conversely, Special Groups seemed to have positioned themselves and their arms caches in the rural areas outside of these cities. As the fighting progressed, it appeared clear that mainstream Jaysh al-Mahdi groups relied on attacks against incoming Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces using small arms and rocket propelled grenades, whereas Special Groups conducted rocket and mortar attacks, IED and VBIED attacks, and assassinations of key individuals. The pattern of violence that emerged at the end of March suggests Jaysh al-Mahdi's militia groups desired to assert their control over specific neighborhoods, whereas the actions of Special Groups seemed more part of a strategy to play a destabilizing role without controlling territory.[23]

The events of the last two weeks strongly suggest that JAM is very weak in the Five Cities areas. As Special Groups usually not found without a JAM presence, this suggests that attacks against JAM will

increase Special Groups' vulnerabilities in central Iraq as they are deprived of support. As the Iraqi Security Forces have undertaken significant action against JAM to quell the recent violence, they have found locals increasingly forthcoming with intelligence on major Special Groups weapons caches, which has served to undermine their infrastructure and operational capabilities in central Iraq.

Al-Kut

Violence broke out in al-Kut on March 11, 2008, in what was the earliest fighting in southern Iraq leading up to the battle for Basra. It is unclear what triggered this conflict, though it may have been the arrest of a senior Jaysh al-Mahdi militia leader in central Kut two days earlier. Though the arrested commander was accused of being a criminal leader, the nature of the accusations (IED attacks against Iraqi Security Forces "all over the province of Wasit") suggested that he had links to Special Groups.[24] Indirect fire attacks on Forward Operating Base Delta (which houses Coalition Soldiers in al-Kut) as well as repeated Katyusha rocket attacks on central Kut, despite Moqtada as-Sadr's recent ceasefire renewal, further indicated a Special Groups presence in the area.[25] These incidents, in addition to the fighting that occurred in more rural areas outside of al-Kut, fit the Special Groups pattern of establishing safe havens outside of cities to project force inwards.[26]

Whether or not there was a Special Groups presence in al-Kut, the overwhelming majority of fighting in the province was conducted by either regular militia or criminal elements, which were attempting to assert some degree control over several districts within the city.[27] The first day's fighting saw fierce clashes erupt between security forces and armed gunmen that left 11 dead and 40 others wounded.[28] In the two weeks that followed, local Iraqi Policy teamed with US Special Forces to quell the violence, relying on a combination of intelligence-driven raids, cordon and clear operations, presence patrols, and checkpoints.[29]

At the end of the fighting, which in fact coincided with the beginning of hostilities in Basra, Iraqi Security Forces were firmly in control of al-Kut.[30] The toll from armed clashes was 40 dead and 75 wounded. Col. Peter Baker, the commander of the 214th Fires Brigade, stated that "the security situation is calm but tense, and the Iraqi Police have always maintained control."31 The case of al-Kut suggests the deployment of a Coalition brigade to interdict the flow of Iranian-sponsored accelerants of violence (arms, weapons, and people) resulted in a marked degradation of both JAM and Special Groups' capabilities. This may suggest that similar efforts in other areas of Iraq could yield comparable results. Indeed, this seems to have been the case in the Mada'in Qada, which abuts Baghdad to the east and was formerly a sanctuary for JAM and Special Groups. Since the 3rd Brigade Combat Team of the 3rd Infantry Division deployed to the area in 2007 and undertook several major operations against Shi'a militia and criminal elements, both JAM and Special Groups activity has declined. When attacked by insurgents, the Iraqi Security Forces also stood their ground and were able to stage a counterattack against the militia's infrastructure.[32] As in al-Kut, Coalition Forces and their ISF counterparts successfully acted to limit the local militia's capabilities, which therefore denied Special Groups the ability to project force.

Diwaniyah and Najaf

Diwaniyah and Najaf were two of the quietest Shi'a areas during the recent violence, likely because they had been previously contested and JAM had been suffered rather decisive defeats in those areas. There was no violence reported in Najaf, while fighting in Diwaniyah left one local policeman and three JAM members dead.[33] In terms of Special Groups activity, Forward Operating Base Echo, which houses a battalion of Polish soldiers, was hit with Iranian rockets. This was the first reported use of this standard Special Groups' tactic in Diwaniyah and it resulted in a crackdown by the local security forces south of the city.[34] Much of this was due to the prior and continuing success of the 8th Division of the Iraqi Army, which is based in Diwaniyah and has been very effective in combating extremist groups throughout the Five Cities area.

Aside from the rocketing and minor street violence, the local police rounded up several Sadrist political leaders and suspected militia commanders in Diwaniyah without major incident.[35] Diwaniyah and Najaf have in common their lack of a significant JAM presence as well as minimal Special Groups activity. This again seems to support the direct correlation between a local JAM presence and Special Groups activity; quite simply, where there is JAM, there are Special Groups. Because Najaf and Diwaniyah had a minimal JAM presence, they likewise had minimal Special Groups activity.

Karbala

In the weeks prior to the Basra offensive, the Karbala provincial government and Iraqi Security Forces were particularly aggressive in going after JAM and particularly Special Groups elements in and around the city. Not only were there several major Special Groups weapons cache finds outside Karbala, but operations were conducted within the city targeting JAM and Special Groups assassination cells.[36] Moqtada al-Sadr's local representative accused the Karbala Provincial Governor and Police Chief of attempting to "liquidate" Sadrists in the province as early as March 17.[37] Indeed, Karbala governor Khazaali would later deliver a speech in which he termed the Sadrists as "outlaws."[38]

The situation escalated over the following week, as the violent backlash against the Basra operations spread across southern Iraq. On March 26, as security personnel were ordered from Karbala to support operations in Basra, gunmen who appeared to be affiliated with JAM staged attacks against Iraqi Police in neighborhoods that were suspected to be JAM strongholds.[39] The Karbala Operations Commander returned from Basra the next day and led an offensive, arresting 48 people and seizing weapons caches that suggested both a regular JAM and Special Groups presence.[40] The Iraqi Security Forces were effective in and around the city, as they continued to discover weapons caches in the areas surrounding the city, find IEDs, and defeat JAM in street battles that left numerous gunmen dead and many more captured.[41] Additionally, many JAM members began to turn themselves in to take advantage of Prime Minister Maliki's offer of a pardon.[42]

In this case, it seems again that Special Groups relied upon the local JAM members to operate and that the ordinary JAM was unable to stand its ground against the Iraqi Security Forces. Furthermore, the Special Groups' strategy of projecting force into Karbala from outside seemed to fail as Iraqi Security Forces were able to push out from the city. Another important factor in the Iraqi Security Forces' success

seems to have been the aggressive actions of the local political and security leadership in combating both Special Groups and regular JAM activities.
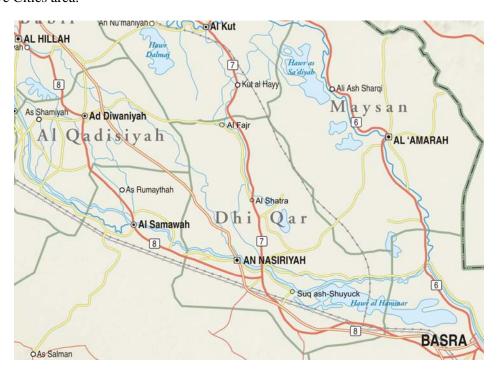

Babil Province

        As JAM and Special Groups have been weakened in the eastern Baghdad belts and Wasit province, becoming less capable of using Highway 6 as a line of communication into Baghdad, they have pushed further west. Recent events in Babil have demonstrated that Special Groups are now relying upon the Highway 8 Corridor in North Babil province to project northwards. The fact that Coalition and Iraqi forces discovered weapons that were produced in 2007 (though the majority of Special Groups weapons finds usually date from 2006 or earlier) as well as the sheer number of weapons found provides very strong evidence that Highway 8 serves as a main line of communication for Special Groups.[43]

        This increased Special Groups presence seems to have been supported, tolerated, or at the very least not resisted by some Iraqi Police elements, in the wake of Babil Police Brigadier General Qais al-Mamouri's assassination in December 2007.[44] As violence flared up in late March 2008, it became clear that there Special Groups safe-havens were located in and around the city of Hillah and in the vicinity of Mahmudiyah. This observation is supported by the massive EFP, rocket, and mortar caches that were discovered along Highway 8; the repeated rocket attacks against the local US consulate and the city of Hillah; IED and EFP attacks in the area; and the well-organized extremist groups that were able to mass and pin down Iraqi Police units on several occasions.[45] In response, Coalition Forces projected force down from their locations further north. They also assisted the Iraqi Security Forces with air support and Special Operations Forces.[46]

        Over the four days of fighting, nine members of the Iraqi Security Forces were killed, 38 were wounded, and three of their vehicles were destroyed. Notably, there were very few civilian casualties (3 killed, 4 wounded), which suggests that the heaviest fighting took place outside of the most heavily populated areas (an observation consistent with the pattern of Special Groups behavior of using rural bases to project into urban centers.)[47] Through the fighting, it became clear that the most effective operators against Special Groups in the area were not the regular Iraqi Police, but members of the Hillah Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team and the Iraqi Army.[48] This may well be because of a weak local police commander or because of potential insurgent infiltration of the local police. In any case, the Iraqi Army has taken over a great deal of the clearing of Mahmudiya, and Coalition Forces appear to have begun attacking Special Groups networks in North Babil with a renewed vigor.[49] Time will tell whether these operations are as effective as the operations to remove the JAM presences and interdict the Special Groups lines of communication from the Highway 6 corridor. Given the ability of Special Groups to dig in to JAM strongholds in areas like Baghdad and Basra, it appears that successful operations to defeat Special Groups networks will not only need to disrupt their lines of communication but will require the denial of safe havens for JAM militias.

Dhi Qar Province

      Like Babil, Dhi Qar province occupies strategic terrain in southern Iraq for both enemy and friendly forces. Nearly all of the major roadways in southern Iraq pass through Dhi Qar, and its provincial capital Nasiriyah. For Special Groups, which have operated in the area for some time, freedom of movement through the province is essential for facilitating funds, weapons, and fighters to and from their strongholds Basrah and the Five Cities area.[50] For Coalition and Iraqi Forces, Dhi Qar province is similarly critical. The province has a large presence of Coalition Forces, stationed at Tallil Air Base, roughly 15 miles southwest of Nasiriyah. U.S. forces from the 1st Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division stationed at Tallil are responsible for securing the ground lines of communication, which is essential for the safe passage of supply convoys coming from Kuwait along Main Supply Route (MSR) Tampa. In essence, the lines of communication that pass through Dhi Qar had been contested by Special Groups, Coalition Forces, and Iraqi Security Forces. Special Groups sought to hinder Coalition and Iraqi movement by planting EFPs and IEDs; while U.S. convoys sought to secure the towns and highways from these extremist groups.[51] Hence, when the violence erupted in Basra, control of the lines of communication through Dhi Qar province became critical for all groups in sustaining the fights in Basra and the Five Cities area.

Map 3: Dhi Qar Province (Map by Philip Schwartzberg, Meridian Mapping)

      While the Basra offensive began on March 25, violence in Dhi Qar province did not erupt until Thursday March 27. While it was reported the Iraqi Security Forces maintained control in the city of Nasiriyah, much of the fighting occurred elsewhere in the province in the areas of al-Shatra and al-Fajr in northern Dhi Qar and Suq ash-Shuyuck south of Nasiriyah.[52] The areas of al-Shatra and al-Fajr lie along Highway 7, which runs from Nasiriyah north to Kut. From the highway, other smaller roads branch off towards Diwaniyah and Hillah, making it the preferred route for Special Groups and their JAM affiliates

who wish to avoid the heavy Coalition and Iraqi Force presence on Highway 8 and MSR Tampa in Dhi Qar province. While clashes between Iraqi Forces and Shi'a gunmen in northern Dhi Qar continued over the next four days, the Iraqi Security Forces maintained control of Nasiriyah and provincial government officials worked with Dhi Qar tribal leaders to stabilize the security situation.[53] By Sunday March 30, 2008, it was reported that the Iraqi Security Forces had successfully cleared gunmen from the southern half of the province, but that Shi'a extremists still controlled pockets of northern and northeastern Dhi Qar.[54]

The incidents in Dhi Qar province during the last week of March revealed several things. First, it evidenced the ability for the Iraqi Security Forces to maintain security in the city of Nasiriyah and in much of the province. For the most part, the Iraqi Army and Police were resolute in carrying out the government's crackdown on rogue militia elements in the province. When it was revealed that there was collusion between Shi'a extremists and an Iraqi Police unit in al-Fajr, the compromised unit was promptly fired by the Deputy Police Commander for the province, underscoring the commitment to restoring law and order.[55] The role that tribal leaders played in mitigating the violence also highlighted the need for the Iraqi government and security forces to work with local power structures to guarantee security, just as they are doing in central and northern Iraq. Finally, the incidents in Dhi Qar reveal much about the patterns of enemy activity in the region. The locations of the fighting demonstrated the main enemy line of communication through the province and the havens they fall back on when pressured. Special Groups and their JAM affiliates were successfully pushed from the southern areas of the province, towards their rural havens in the north. Because the fighting in Dhi Qar revealed main enemy lines of communication and the pattern of enemy activity, it now presents an important opportunity for Coalition and Iraqi Security Forces to continue to target their network in southern Iraq.

Conclusion

Special Groups have emerged as the greatest threat to peace in Iraq, which means that their defeat is a primary objective of Coalition and Iraqi Forces. In Baghdad and Basra, where both JAM and Special Groups are strongest, the groups will likely continue to reinforce one another, with JAM operating as a vanguard for the militia. Because JAM provides safe havens in and around cities to Special Groups, Coalition and Iraqi Forces will have to remove these militia safe havens in order to defeat Special Groups. The militia's influence was most evident in Baghdad and Basra, where these groups were capable provide strong resistance to Coalition and Iraqi attempts to push into their strongholds; however, they were less capable in the areas in between those cities. This suggests that JAM – and therefore Special Groups – is vulnerable in the Five Cities area, as well as Dhi Qar province, which presents opportunities for further action.

Finally, it is clear that Coalition efforts to increase the Iraqi Security Forces capabilities have proved effective in an operational sense and that there are many Iraqi Soldiers and Policemen who demonstrated a willingness to fight hard in order to carry out their missions. The Iraqi Security Forces were able to secure the Five Cities areas as well as Nasiriyah. Furthermore the Iraqi Government demonstrated resolve in going after both JAM and Special Groups in those areas, which suggests that there was an offensive planned for the whole country rather than the sort of accidental violence that appears to have been portrayed in the media. Nevertheless, while the ISF have made great strides since

2004, the Iraqi Security Forces showed that they are not yet ready to plan and carry out major operations on their own and will require continued assistance from Coalition Forces.

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[1] Militias from the Sadrist Trend, the Fadila party, and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) have been locked in a violent fight for control of the city. Elsewhere in southern Iraq, the Sadrists and ISCI have vied for control of provincial and city governments. In cities such as Diwaniyah and Kut, Sadr's militias, the Jaysh al-Mahdi, have battled with ISCI's Badr militias (who have been incorporated into the Iraqi Security Forces). Fadila's influence is primarily limited to Basra province.

[2] Michael R. Gordon, Eric Schmitt and Stephen Farrell, "U.S. Cites Planning Gaps in Iraqi Assault on Basra," *The New York Times*, April 3, 2008.

[3] Ryan Lenz, "Iraq: US airstrike on southern town kills 8; Iraqi, US troops crackdown elsewhere," Associated Press Worldstream, March 29, 2008.

[4] Michael R. Gordon, Eric Schmitt and Stephen Farrell, "U.S. Cites Planning Gaps in Iraqi Assault on Basra," *The New York Times*, April 3, 2008.

[5] Warren P. Strobel and Leila Fadel, "Iranian who brokered Iraqi peace is on U.S. terrorist watch list," McClatchy Newspapers, March 31, 2008.

[6] Erica Goode, "Normal Life Starts to Return as Iraqi Forces Regain Control in Basra," *The New York Times*, April 3, 2008.

[7] Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release A080403c, "Coalition forces conduct airstrike in Basra, two criminals killed," April 3, 2008; Multi-National Corps – Iraq Press Release No. 20080404-5, "ISF kill 7 criminal members, detain 16 in 3 separate operations in Basra," Multi-National Corps – Iraq PAO, April 4, 2008; Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release A080404a, "Coalition forces conduct airstrike in al-Halaf, six criminals killed," April 4, 2008.

[8] Press Briefing with Maj. Gen. Kevin J. Bergner, Multi-National Force - Iraq Spokesman, Operational Update, April 2, 2008.

[9] Press Briefing with Maj. Gen. Kevin J. Bergner, Multi-National Force - Iraq Spokesman, Operational Update, September 17, 2007.

[10] Multi-National Force Iraq Press Release No.20080212-19, "Local tip yields cache," Multi-National Division-Baghdad PAO, February 12, 2008; Multi-National Force Iraq Press Release No.20070226-01, "Iraqi Police, Coalition Forces Discover Large EFP Cache," Multi-National Division-Baghdad PAO, February 26, 2007; Multi-National Force Iraq Press Release No. 20071024-09, "Tip from Concerned Iraqi Citizen leads to large EFP, explosives cache," Multi-National Division-Baghdad PAO, October 24, 2007; Staff Sgt. Russell Bassett, 4th Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 2nd Infantry Division, **"**Concerned Local Citizen Tip Leads Coalition Troops to Explosives Factory," Multi-National Force-Iraq Daily Stories, Sunday, November 4, 2007.

[11] Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release A080102b, "Coalition forces disrupt criminal network; detain suspected Special Groups member," January 02, 2008; Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release A080108a, "Coalition forces capture Special Groups leader; detain four suspects," January 8, 2008; Multi-National Corps – Iraq RELEASE No. 20080110-04, "Citizen tip leads Coalition to cache (Baghdad)," Multi-National Division – Baghdad PAO, January 10, 2008; Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release A080111a, "Coalition forces capture Special Groups facilitator, disrupt criminal networks," January 11, 2008; Multi-National Corps – Iraq Press Release No. 20080119-09, "MND-B Soldiers discover EFP, arrest 3," Multi-National Division – Baghdad PAO, January 19, 2008; Multi-National Corps – Iraq Press Release No. 20080119-13, "MND-B Forces seize enemy rockets," Multi-National Division – Baghdad PAO, January 19, 2008; Press Release 13JAN08-083, "Coalition forces disrupt criminal element networks; armed man killed," January 13, 2008; Multi-National Corps – Iraq Press Release No. 20080124-01, "MND-B Soldiers detain suspected extremist cell leader (Baghdad)," Multi-National Division – Baghdad PAO, January 24, 2008; Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release A080128a, "Anti-Coalition forces operative captured; criminal networks disrupted," January 28, 2008; Multi-National Force – Iraq Press Release A080130a, "Coalition forces detain four suspected criminals," January 30, 2008; Multi-National Corps – Iraq Press Release No. 20080204-02, "Iraqi, U.S. Special Forces detain two extremist leaders in separate operations," Multi-National Corps – Iraq PAO, February 4, 2008 ; Multi-National Corps – Iraq Press Release No. 20080203-13, "Citizen tip leads Iraqi Security Forces to large weapons cache," Multi-National Corps – Iraq PAO, February 3, 2008; Multi-National Corps – Iraq Press Release No. 20080203-09, "Extremists, Coalition Forces continue skirmish outside Sadr City," Multi-National Division – Baghdad PAO, February 3, 2008; Multi-National Force-Iraq Press Release A080202b, Coalition forces capture criminal Special Groups facilitator, detain two other suspects, February 2, 2008; Multi-National Corps – Iraq Press Release No. 20080204-11, "Night raids apprehend eight extremists,"

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